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**COMMITTEE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY**

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park
(Germany/Luxembourg)

Category C

RENEWAL

Mr Charles STAUFFER
(France)

GERMANO-LUXEMBOURG PARK

1. BACKGROUND

The Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park was formally established on April 1964. In reply to the joint request made by the two countries, the Council of Europe awarded it the European Diploma, category C. This award was renewed in 1978 and then again in 1983, 1988 and 1993.

As the diploma award is up for renewal, the Council of Europe Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities assigned me the task of carrying out an on-the-spot appraisal.

2. THE APPRAISAL

The visit took place on 29 and 30 May 1997. No member of the Secretariat was able to accompany me.

The terms of reference I was given instructed me to check that the recommendations of Resolution (93) 13, of which a copy is appended, had been carried out.

On my arrival at Vianden, I was welcomed by Mr KREMER, the Luxembourg Nature Conservation Commissioner for the Northern District.

3. MAIN FEATURES OF THE DIPLOMA-WINNING AREA

NB: The Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park will be hereafter referred to as the *park*.

The *park*, which is 50 km long and 20 km wide at its widest point, extends along both sides of the border between the two countries. The border in the north is formed by the River OUR, and in the south by the River SURE, running from ECHTERNACH in the south to the Belgian frontier in the north.

Altitude: from 550 m in the north to 150m at its southern most point.

Temperature: 8° on average, but 2° less to the north.

Rainfall: from 1000mm in the Ardennes in the north to 650mm in the south.

Geology: Devonian schist in the Ardennes, whereas the south is formed of muschelkalk of the Keuper series overlaid with Lias sandstone.

Vegetation: there are two distinct regions and this contrast is constantly apparent:

- the Ardennes in the north, which are heavily forested: only the high ground is cultivated. The parcelling out of mainly private forest property has encouraged the excessive spread of spruce which has taken the place of native deciduous species;
- the south, which has a more hospitable climate and where there is much more agriculture extending up the slopes to meet the forest. Mixed deciduous woodlands are predominant.

This diversity of environmental conditions gives rise to an abundance and wide variety of fauna and flora.

There are more than fifty towns and villages in the *park*, a sign, if one were needed, of the high density of the population, more concentrated in the south, in this region.

4. THE ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATION OF THE AWARD WINNING AREA

Day-to-day management and transfrontier co-ordination is carried out by a private association, the "Verein Deutsch-Luxemburgischer Naturpark" whose head office is in IRREL and which is alternately chaired by a German and a Luxembourgier.

An intergovernmental committee, comprising the Minister for the Environment of the Rhineland-Palatinate Land and the Luxembourg Water and Forestry Directorate, regulates legal matters arising from the international border.

The Luxembourg Act on nature parks of 10 August 1993 gave Luxembourg the legal means of setting up natural parks.

This new law raises several problems. The present associative structure of the *park* is not provided for by this law, which specifies that nature parks are placed under the supervision of a public corporation established by the state and the communes. It also specifies that the boundaries of a nature park should coincide with the boundaries of communes or at least of sections of communes, whereas the boundaries of the *park* are natural or physical boundaries.

We must remember that the German side of the *park* is also the southwest sector of the SÜD-EIFEL Nature Park and that this area under consideration therefore benefits from the logistical support of that structure.

5. MATTERS COVERED BY THE APPRAISAL

5.1 The Our Valley

5.1.1 The Our valley electricity company installations

The Our dam is a fundamental part of the installations. Among other things, 1300 m³ of waterborne waste are recovered and recycled annually at this spot, but the dam also forms an impassable barrier for fish, particularly for salmon. A plan to restore a passage for salmon is being studied as part of the "Salmon 2000" Project.

By slowing down the current, the dam causes the sedimentation of fine particles brought downstream. The water filtering through the dam is thus purer.

The River Our, which rises in Belgium, is already polluted when it reaches the *park*. The flow of water leaving the dam is constantly maintained at exactly the same rate as it is above the dam, as the basin only acts as a collector supplying water for the turbines of the reservoir installed on the summit of the Néklosbiërg. The complex was built forty years ago.

5.1.2. *The project for an Our Valley nature park (Luxembourg)*

This project is chaired by the Minister for Town and Country Planning and relies on the Luxembourg Parks Act which is not legally binding.

The project is the result of a popular initiative supported by local elected representatives.

The preparatory study is to be presented to the population, so that it can express its views, in the autumn of 1997. It will then be discussed with regard to town and country planning and, finally, with regard to nature conservation criteria. At present there are no plans for regulations to be drawn up before the year 2000. The implementation of this project will supplement the existing nature reserves in the German part of the *park*, thus forming a more substantial unit.

This initiative can only be welcomed.

NB: The characteristic of the Luxembourg Act is that it gives the population the opportunity to become involved with their environment. In this respect, it is quite distinct from German legislation.

5.1.3. *The Our Valley Renaturation Project*

In parallel with the establishment of a nature park in the Our valley, there is a transfrontier project for the renaturation of the Our valley, the "Renaturierung des Urtals" (a Germano-Belgo-Luxembourg project) which entails a great deal of dialogue and an adaptation of German law, to enable the socio-economic implications to be made compatible with nature conservation requirements.

This INTER-REG project, which concerns four regions, should come to fruition in 2001. It regards farmers not just as entrepreneurs but partners, whose living will depend on enhancing the natural environment which they exploit. The objective of safeguarding water quality takes into account the topology of the natural zones in relation to their geological bases.

NB: It would appear that the future of the Our valley inevitably depends on co-operation between the three countries.

Could this not be a basis for associating the Hautes Fagnes-Eifel Nature Park with the future of the Germano-Luxembourg park?

5.1.4. *The Kalborn Mill*

This mill, which I visited during my last appraisal, has just been purchased by the foundation for nature conservation, "HÖLLEF für Natur".

One realises from the state of this ancient mill which is progressively losing its heritage value, that one must be vigilant as to the intentions of any future owners.

The Our valley was formerly exploited for its hydraulic power, as can be seen from the remains of numerous mills. It is to be regretted that this exceptional cultural heritage has been left to deteriorate.

NB: The restoration of one of these sites would make it possible for their glorious past to be recalled and for a few former achievements to be saved for future generations to admire.

5.1.5. *Campsites*

Campsites, of which there are fewer upstream from Vianden, participate in the economic activity of the region without causing too much harm. Eco-tourism is always tolerable if kept within modest limits.

5.2 The Ardennes Plateau

5.2.1. *Hosingen Park (Luxembourg)*

During my last visit, the many grandiose plans which were being studied for Hosingen Park were the cause of much concern. Today, the site has been given over to a regional school, which does not seem out of proportion in this sector and avoids any other speculation.

5.2.2. *The development of Irrhausen (Germany)*

This development, which I visited during my last trip, has been perfectly blended into the landscape and the public reception facilities are very well designed. They were built and are maintained by a team of workers billeted in Irrel. This subject will be dealt with a later chapter.

5.2.3. *The Waxweiler Quarry (Germany)*

The concession for working this quarry, which is situated in the north-east corner of the *park* and is still in activity, will expire in one or two years. The great wealth of its geological strata (Late Devonian) will be shown to advantage by the *park* authorities; it is planned to reproduce a part of the shallow sea (Wattenmeer) with which the local strata originated. This should offer tourists an interesting occupation during their stay.

5.2.4. *The Muxerath windmill generators (Germany)*

Fourteen 80 m high windmills stand in a line on the Muxerath ridge. The non-polluting production of energy is to be welcomed, but it has to be recognised that from the point of view of the landscape, these erections spoil the horizon.

During my previous visit, I mentioned the problem of visual pollution caused by the high voltage line which begins at the Our power station. In Muxerath, the visual impact is high but localised.

NB: It would be interesting to take advantage of these windmills to study their impact on fauna and insect life.

5.2.5. *Naturschutzzentrum Gaytal (Germany)*

This centre, which was built in 1966 and is financed by the Palatinate with INTER-REG funds and the financial backing of the Allianz insurance group, is the subject of much controversy.

The deliberately provocative nature of the centre's very modern design (concrete, glass and steel) is intended to show that modernism can contribute to nature conservation.

The aim of the exhibitions, which are laid out over two floors, is to inform the public about:

- renewable energies,
- the *park* (it could not be ignored!),
- culture, nature and technology as the subject of development.

The *park* authorities were excluded from the discussions which were held before the centre was built although nature conservation, with which this project is concerned, is the very object of the *park*.

I feel that in excluding the *park* authorities from these discussions, the project has failed to achieve the success it could have had. This can only be deplored and it must be hoped that its future activities will be carried out in full consultation with the representatives of the local nature conservation institutions.

5.3 The Sandstone south

5.3.1. The Teufelsschlucht Information Centre (Germany)

The Teufelsschlucht Information Centre has been set up in the former premises of a forestry school. It was converted with financial aid from Europe (70%), the district authorities, the regional authorities and the Süd-Eifel Nature Park (30%). Its aim is to teach the public about how to interpret the environment.

All of the centre's collections have been designed with an educational purpose. It also includes an educational trail, a bee-keeping school, etc.

The expectations which I had of this centre when I referred to the plans for it five years ago have been entirely fulfilled.

5.3.2 Irrel

In 1975, measures taken to encourage employment proved that it was possible for a nature park to create jobs.

To this end, the German Government made DM 80 million available in the form of salaries. This money enabled job seekers to be trained in the upkeep of the *park* amenities (planting, setting up rest areas and other improvements).

The final phase of the project involves quarters being set up in a property in Irrel where, in the near future, the *park* administration department and the offices of the team of workers we have just referred to, which belongs to the "Vereinznaturpark Sud-Eiffel", will be housed under the same roof.

The team of workers also operates in Luxembourg thanks to an agreement with the Luxembourg Ministry of Labour which enables them to be covered by social insurance when they work abroad. In order to simplify management, it is planned to set up a binational team with the specific aim of providing employment for job-seekers.

At present, this scheme functions without any external aid. The profits it makes are used to build up equipment and stocks. The purchase of a mobile sawmill and the setting up of carpenters' workshops has provided this team, which will eventually include 75 people, with the means of carrying out a great deal of very varied work.

This success is due to the energy of the current manager.

It is an initiative which should be greatly encouraged.

5.3.3. *Houllay (the former millstone quarries)*

The caves that were made in the sandstone at Houllay for the extraction of millstones provide these gorges with an added attraction.

Some of them are used as an open-air theatre whereas the others are frequently visited. The numerous traces of unauthorised campsites give this area a dilapidated appearance and unsupervised visits will speed up the deterioration of this most beautiful site.

Faced with increased pressure, it is urgent that a solution be found, either by placing the area under heavy surveillance, or by restricting access to it to certain times of the day and imposing an entry fee.

During the appraisal, a group of young ecologists lit a fire as they were preparing to spend the night in one of these caves.

As with the problem of rock climbing five years ago, a satisfactory solution needs to be found quickly.

5.3.4. *Berdorf*

Work has just been done on the path leading to the lookout above the Berdorf rocks to make it accessible to people in wheelchairs. Work on the amenities was completed with the addition of guard rails.

This is another step forward in making nature available to the largest number.

5.3.5. *Camping facilities*

The floods of January 1993 seriously damaged the numerous campsites which had been set up on the banks of the Our and Sure rivers. Repair work has been partially carried out but as the demand remains high, it is extremely likely that past mistakes will be repeated.

5.4. The Five Recommendations of Resolution (93) 13

5.4.1. Recommendation 1

The Luxembourg Act on National Parks has brought legislation in the two countries closer, making it easier for the park managers to consult each other.

5.4.2. Recommendation 2

The description of the Our Valley Nature Park Project fully concurs with this recommendation.

5.4.3. Recommendation 3

The areas of open valley-floor farmland are being successfully maintained. Unfortunately, farmers are less and less interested in these grasslands.

Maintenance sometimes has to be carried out by *park* staff.

5.4.4. Recommendation 4

Trees have been planted along some country paths, mainly on abandoned farmland, thus relieving the monotony induced by certain farming practices.

5.4.5. Recommendation 5

I have referred to the developments which have taken place in the Hosingen Park and which are in keeping with Recommendation (93) 5.

Vigilance needs to be maintained as far as short stay amenities are concerned. The floods contributed to this slight improvement.

6. CONCLUSION

The two days spent in appraising the *park* made it possible for me to observe the progress which had been made since my last visit. This progress is noticeable both as regards reception and educational amenities available to the public. The complexity of the problems which arise in a densely populated park gives me grounds for stating that the constant efforts made on both sides of the frontier deserve to be encouraged by the renewal of the European Diploma Category C, for a further five-year period.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage collaboration between all the parties concerned by the Our basin (Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg).
2. Constitute a team of frontier workers to operate throughout all the entire *Park*.
3. Maintain vigilance with regard to campsites and canoeing activities.
4. Continue consultation aimed at seeking uniform legislation on both sides of the border.
5. Endeavour to reduce the harm caused by tourists to the Houllay millstone quarries.
6. Take advantage of the presence of the windmills to study their impact on fauna and insect life.

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Appendix I contains a copy of Resolution (93) 13 adopted where the European Diploma was last renewed; in Appendix II, the Secretariat presents a draft resolution for renewal of the diploma until 2003.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (93) 13

**ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
AWARDED TO THE GERMANO-LUXEMBOURG NATURE PARK
(Germany-Luxembourg)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1993
at the 493rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,
Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (73) 33 awarding the European Diploma to the Germano-Luxembourg
Nature Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of
the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE),

Renews the European Diploma, Category C, awarded to the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park
until 25 October 1998;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. step up a more effective consultation so that Luxembourg officials can put into practice the same politics as their German counterparts at the same time;
2. continue the work of establishing a coherent nature reserve network;
3. maintain by appropriate farming practices the few areas of open valley-floor farmland;
4. use tree lining of roads to safeguard local strains of apple and pear trees;
5. follow a development policy which seeks to restrict the adverse effects of certain tourist, sporting and leisure activities. Particular care should be taken with the interministerial development project at Hosingen, taking account of its impact on the local landscape.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION

on the renewal of the European Diploma
to the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with Article 15.a. of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (73) 33 awarding the European Diploma Category C, to the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP),

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park until 25 October 2003;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

- Encourage collaboration between all the parties concerned by the Our basin (Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg).
- Constitute a team of frontier workers to operate throughout the entire *park*.
- Maintain vigilance with regard to campsites and canoeing activities.
- Continue consultation aimed at seeking uniform legislation on both sides of the frontier.
- Endeavour to reduce the harm caused by tourists to the Houllay millstone quarries.
- Take advantage of the presence of windmills to study their impact on fauna and insect life.